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SUBJECT: NORTHERN NOTES -- NOVEMBER 2009

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1. (U) The following summary of last month's major developments in Northern Greece contains items on the following topics:

Political:

- o Local Reactions to New Opposition Leader Samaras
- o Papandreou Hosts Trilateral Environmental Meeting
- o Rainbow Party Opens Second Office
- o Calls for the Closure of the Turkish Consulate in Komotini

Econ/Commerce:

- o Businesses Feel Effects of Financial Crisis
- o Bulgarian and Greek Border Communities Protest Planned Gold Processing Plant

Organized Crime/Terrorism:

- o Greek Diplomat Found Guilty of Visa Fraud
- o "Revolutionary Struggle" Members Frequent Thessaloniki
- o Arson Attacks and Other Security Incidents
- o Decline in Illegal Immigration Arrests Near Evros
- o Trafficking Arrests in Northern Greece
- o October Drug Figures Released for Thessaloniki
- o Child Porn Arrests in Northern Greece

LOCAL REACTIONS TO NEW ND HEAD SAMARAS

¶1. (SBU) On November 29, the center-right New Democracy party elected Antonios Samaras as its new leader. Although Samaras won 50.06% of the party vote overall (over former FoMin Dora Bakoyannis' 39.76%), he lost by a much wider margin in the Muslim populated areas of Thrace, where he is viewed by the minority as being hostile to its interests. Post's contacts commonly mention Samaras' refusal to include Muslim candidates in his former Political Spring party (1993-2004) as a source of their mistrust. Samaras supporters stated to the media that he has been misunderstood by sections of the population and offered assurances that there will be no discriminatory practices in the party under the new leadership. Mr. Samaras, who had famously resigned as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1993, arguing for a harder line on the Macedonia name issue, has thus far refrained from fully clarifying his present position on the matter, other than to say that it is "imperative" that Macedonia accept a name "erga omnes." In other ND party election results, Bakoyannis was strongly supported by the Muslim minority, receiving as much as 90% of the vote in certain areas, but scored disappointingly overall, winning only four of the 16 northern Greek prefectures. Finally, Thessaloniki Prefect Panagiotis Psomiadis, to the right of the party and very vocal on foreign policy issues, performed better than predicted by the media, receiving over 20% of the party vote in Northern Greece with a national average of 10%.

#### GREEK PRIME MINISTER HOSTS TRILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL MEETING

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¶2. (SBU) On the weekend of November 27-29, PM Papandreou hosted a trilateral meeting with Macedonian PM Nikola Gruevski and Albanian PM Sali Berisha in the Prespes area, where the three countries' borders meet. The meeting had a primarily environmental agenda, namely discussion about initiatives to preserve the ecologically important Prespes lakes, which extend into all three countries. However, local press also described it as a "small step" towards finding a solution to the Macedonian name issue, despite the fact it did not bear any tangible results.

#### MACEDONIAN ACTIVIST PARTY OPENS SECOND OFFICE IN NORTHERN GREECE

¶3. (SBU) On November 15, the Rainbow Party -- advocates for the rights of the Slavic Macedonian community in Greece -- opened its second office in the Northern Greek town of Edessa. The opening took place in the presence of some of the party's members and supporters. No security incidents were reported and the event attracted only minimal press attention. [NOTE: When the party inaugurated its first office in the town of Florina on September 06, 1995, protestors broke into the premises, attacked those inside and caused extensive material damage. END NOTE.]

#### CALLS FOR THE CLOSURE OF THE TURKISH CONSULATE IN KOMOTINI

14. (SBU) A citizens' initiative entitled "Consulate - STOP" was inaugurated in the Thrace town of Komotini, requesting the closure of the Turkish Consulate in the area. The initiative, also backed by a segment of the local media, organized multiple events in support of its cause including distribution of leaflets, public lectures, etc. and its founding members claimed it was "gaining momentum by the day." On November 12, an MP from the far right LAOS party brought the organization's activities to Parliament's attention, asking for Parliamentary backing of the idea. The main principles of "Consulate - STOP" are: (a) the Lausanne Treaty has been "violated by Turkey on numerous occasions, so as to be rendered irrelevant"; (b) The Turkish Consulate has no real reason to be in Komotini, since "there are few Turkish citizens in the area, all of whom can visit the Consulate in Thessaloniki"; (c) the Greek state is unable to monitor the "undermining" activities of the Consulate that "go way beyond a Diplomatic Mission's duties and jeopardize the peaceful environment in the region"; and (d) if necessary, Greece should be ready to "sacrifice" its Consulate in Istanbul in return for the abolition of the one in Komotini.

#### NORTHERN GREECE FEELS EFFECTS OF FINANCIAL CRISIS

15. (U) Throughout November, local media published results of national surveys about the state of the economy in Northern Greece. According to one survey, 97% of Thessaloniki-based businesses reported that the financial crisis has affected them, compared to just 66% of those based in Athens. At the same time, 57% of Thessaloniki businesses, as opposed to only 25% of those in Athens, appeared optimistic about the future, stating that they are confident that in the next three years competitiveness will increase. In a separate survey, 70% of Northern Greek businesses reported they must travel to Athens approximately 10 times a year for permits, certifications and other bureaucratic reasons, while another 15% reported an increased need of up to 30 such trips per year. Also, local media reported on data released by the General Confederation of Labor, showing five Northern Greek prefectures being among those with the biggest percentages of people living below the poverty line. Lastly, another survey showed that 15,900 jobs were lost

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in small industries in the Prefecture of Thessaloniki between May and November 2009. Also, 68% of small industries reported a decrease in their turnover in the last 12 months.

#### PLAN FOR GOLD PROCESSING PLANT ON GREEK-BULGARIAN BORDER INFURIATES LOCALS

16. (SBU) The possible establishment of a gold processing plant in the Bulgarian municipality of Kirjali, close to the Greek-Bulgarian border, angered local communities on both sides of the border and led to joint protests over potential environmental hazards associated with its operation. The plant will need to maintain a cyanide reservoir, which is planned to be located only 200 yards from the major river Ardas that crosses both countries and would therefore pose a contamination risk to it. In their fight against the project, local authorities in Thrace have secured the support of the GoG, while two MEPs -- Kriton Arsenis and Stavros Labrinidis -- have brought the matter to the attention of the European Commission.

## THESSALONIKI COURT SENTENCES GREEK DIPLOMAT FOR FRAUD

17. (U) On November 02, the Thessaloniki Appeals Court sentenced a former Director of the Greek Consulate in Kiev to 10.5 years imprisonment for issuing over 2,500 fraudulent Greek tourist visas for money. The visas were issued in 2002. A Kiev Consulate clerk and a tour operator were also sentenced to five and three years imprisonment respectively for their roles in the scheme. A Thessaloniki policeman who is accused of providing blank invitation forms to the Consulate Director will be tried separately.

## "REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE" MEMBERS IN THESSALONIKI

18. (U) On November 01, local media cited police Anti-Terrorist Squad sources as claiming that the masterminds of "Revolutionary Struggle" and the "Revolutionary Sect" are frequently found in Thessaloniki. They specifically mention a 40-45 year old male who lives in Thessaloniki and allegedly provides the ideological background to the organization and a young female "link" who visits the city on dates, relevant to serious attacks.

## ARSON ATTACKS, PROTESTS, AND OTHER SECURITY INCIDENTS

19. (U) In the early hours of November 17, local media reported on an arson attack with gas canisters against the entrance of a store. Minor material damage was caused and no arrests were made. On November 17, a group of about 500 people, demonstrating as part of the November 17 commemoration events, threw rocks at a police station in downtown Thessaloniki and later on, Molotov cocktails and rocks from inside the Aristotle University campus. Police reacted by deploying motorbike units and using tear gas. They detained 30 demonstrators, subsequently arresting one of them. On November 24, Thessaloniki police arrested three people in connection with an earlier arson attack (November 22) on a public transport bus. Police said the three were part of a larger group of around 20 individuals that had damaged the bus. The incident was related to soccer hooliganism. On November 24, an anti-government group hang-out called "Solidarity Buena Ventura" was bombed by unknown

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culprits. The explosive device that was used -- a pipe bomb -- caused serious damage to the premises and smashed windows in the wider neighborhood. Media speculated the attack may have been perpetrated by a rival anarchist group.

## DECLINE IN ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION ARRESTS NEAR EVROS

110. (SBU) On November 11, local media reported that the number of illegal immigrants (4,500) arrested in the Greek-Turkish border area of Evros in the period January-October 2009, was reduced by 30%, compared to the same period the year before.

The number of arrested smugglers (250) was reduced by 20% for the same period. Media cited Thrace police sources that attributed the lower figures to the fact that organized rings now seek alternative routes to smuggle people into the country and on into western Europe. These alternative routes include the Greek islands, Bulgaria, and Albania. Police sources confirmed the above trend to Post, but spoke of a higher reduction of 38-40% in arrests.

#### TRAFFICKING ARRESTS IN NORTHERN GREECE

¶11. (U) On November 05, the Hellenic Police arrested a female bar owner and two male employees on charges of trafficking and pimping in the northwestern Greek town of Ptolemaida. They were accused of forcing foreign women into prostitution by exertion of physical force and by the withholding of their travel documents. All three were Greek citizens.

#### OCTOBER DRUG FIGURES RELEASED

¶12. (U) On November 05, local media published a report by the Thessaloniki Police detailing drug-related criminal activities in Thessaloniki for the month of October. According to the report, 25 drug dealers were arrested during this period, while police confiscated a total of 5kg of heroin, 1.5kg of cocaine, almost 20kg of hashish and different quantities of liquid methadone and pills.

#### CHILD PORN ARRESTS IN NORTHERN GREECE

¶13. (U) On November 20, police arrested two individuals in the town of Kilkis for possessing child pornography material. After appearing before an examining magistrate, they were both released on bail. On November 23, Thessaloniki police arrested an individual after a search of his residence on charges of possession and trafficking of child pornography material. Local police reportedly traced him following a dispatch by Interpol.  
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